

Land East of Manifold Drive SWT Comments

Date: August 2025

Application Reference: SMD/2025/0243

Location: Land East of Manifold Drive and South of Rakeway Road

Proposed Development: Outline planning permission with some matters reserved for access for residential development and associated landscaping and on-site infrastructure

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

Documents Viewed:

- Application form
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report, RSE_9658_R1_V1_PEAR, RammSanderson, May 2025
- Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool completed on 16th May 2025 by Erika Nishitani
- Planning statement, Knights, May 2025, Ref CCP5/2/PS
- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy, May 2025, Waterco, ref: 14911-FRA & Drainage Strategy-03
- BIA Proposed Habitat Plan, RammSanderson, Ref: 25037, 16/05/2025
- BIA Baseline Habitat Plan, RammSanderson, Ref: 25037, 16/05/2025
- Proposed sketch site plan, Calderpeel Architects, 10.04.25
- Site Location Plan, Calderpeel Architects, 30.04.25

Summary: Please note we are awaiting a response from SMDC about how they would like to secure the monitoring and management of BNG in an outline application and will likely need to redress our comments relating this. As it is near the end of the bat survey season, we wanted to provide comments as soon as possible to avoid delays for a further year rather than wait for answers to our query. We recommend a **holding objection** until the following information is supplied and our comments are resolved:

- Please carry out a full GLTA.
- Please carry out bat transect and automated detector surveys as per current survey guidance (Collins, 2023) or give clarification as to why these are not required in this instance.
- Detail on the suitability of the site for foraging and commuting bats in the report is contradictory.
- Provide details of the surveyor's competency to carry out a BNG assessment.

- Clarification as to why the two ditches mentioned in the PEA and further ditch mentioned in the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy are not included in the statutory biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool (SMBCT).
- Strategic significance should be updated accordingly in the metric – this alters the net gain units.
- Please supply the condition assessments for the BNG
- Further information from the applicant regarding off-site BNG – this would include answering the following - is this a registered habitat bank? What is the proximity to the development? Do they wish to enter a S106 to secure the off-site BNG?
- SMDC need to clarify how they wish to secure the significant on-site and any blue-line boundary BNG for outline permissions through a S106
- Applicant to provide heads of terms for a S106 securing any significant on-site or blue line boundary BNG delivery.
- A draft HMMP to set the S106(s) securing monitoring and management.
- S106 needs to be in place securing the management and monitoring of 10% BNG.
- Prior to securing the HMMP, would recommend demonstrating BNG hierarchy has been applied.
- Please clarify whether this will be a phased development

Conditions required

- Condition securing HMMP
- Condition securing LEMP
- Conditions for species as detailed below
- Further conditions or changes in detail pending the results of the bat survey (s).

Further detail

PEA

Bats

Given the presence ‘*several mature trees*’ and the proposed scale and likely impacts of the proposed development we would request that a full GLTA is carried out. Although the trees are understood to be retained there could be indirect impacts on roosting bats (if present) during and after construction. At the construction stage this could include noise, vibration and lighting in proximity to the trees.

Please give further detail on the suitability of the site for foraging and commuting bats as the report is contradictory. The report states ‘*The Site also had high suitability (Collins 2023), for foraging and commuting bats in the tree lines, hedgerows and scrub habitats. Additionally, more field boundaries adjacent to the site provides connectivity to the*

wider environment'...this is then contradicted with *'The Site was considered to have moderate suitability to support foraging and commuting bats, as the trees and hedgerows had good connectivity to the wider landscape, it is unlikely to be severance of habitat connectivity for bats and therefore further bat activity surveys are considered disproportionate.'* Does the site have high or moderate suitability for foraging or commuting bats? At the completed development stage there will likely be a reduction in quality of foraging and commuting habitat due to direct habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and indirect effects from increased lighting. For this reason, we would request that bat transect and automated detector surveys are carried out to assess the impact on foraging and commuting bats, or to clarification given as to why these are not required in this instance.

BNG

Surveyor competency

The competency of the surveyor is not demonstrating competency to carry out surveys / a BNG assessment. The competency stated - *'Qualifying member of Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management'* needs to (as per the CIEEM website) *'complete our online application form below and tell us a little bit about yourself, how you're involved in the sector, and what plans you have to develop your experience, competence and career in the next few years.'* This does not demonstrate that the surveyor has the skills, knowledge and experience to carry out the surveys completed. Evidence may include – types of surveys completed in the past, FISC level, any professional training courses undertaken, adherence to CIEEM's Competency Standard for Preliminary Habitat Survey or even self-guided learning in plant identification. Demonstration of competence should be in line with BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity – code of practice for planning and development.

Strategic Significance

A small area in the east of the site is classed as semi-strategic for pastures on the Net Gain Staffordshire map (<https://netgainstaffs.com/map/>). The metric should be updated to account for this – modified grassland should be classed as 'location ecologically desirable'; this changes the score for the metric.

Ditches

The PEA mentions two ditches on-site, however, these have not been included in the statutory biodiversity metric calculation tool (SBMCT) and will need to be or justification given as to why they are not included in the SBMCT e.g. they are likely to retain water for less than 4 months a year. The Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy mentions 'There is an unnamed ditch located along the northern site boundary', this is not included in the BNG assessment or maps. Please explain why this is not included in the

metric calculations – any watercourse within 10m of the boundary should be included in the SMBCT.

BNG Planning Conditions / S106 and Documents Needed to Make a Planning Decision

Please note, requirements may change depending upon how SMDC wish to proceed with securing BNG for outline permissions.

BNG for outline applications is treated as phased development. The submission of the completed metric tool allows us to make comments to aid future decisions.

If plans change, a new BNG assessment will need to be completed. As this is outline, and details of the development such as landscaping have not yet been determined, it is recommended that provisions are put in place to ensure that any significant on-site and blue line boundary off-site BNG delivery is secured by appropriate planning conditions or a S106. Development cannot begin before an overall biodiversity gain plan and any phase biodiversity gain plans are submitted and approved by SMDC.

Before a planning decision can be reached, we will need to determine whether the biodiversity gain condition is capable of being discharged. We would need more detail on how the 10% BNG may be achieved. In addition, this would involve legally securing the management and monitoring for 30 years after the completion of the development of any on-site BNG and off-site (blue line boundary) BNG owned by the developer (unless this is legally secured elsewhere e.g. already registered as a habitat bank) through a S106 agreement. The applicant should submit draft heads of terms for S106's securing on and off site BNG. To enable S106 to be set, a draft HMMP would be required. For any habitats requiring specific soil or ground conditions e.g. meadows or species rich grasslands of at least moderate distinctiveness, a LEMP, landscape plan with sufficient detail or similar document will also be required, possibly with soil testing carried out to show conditions are suitable for planned habitats – currently these are not planned. These are in addition to the net gain condition. The S106 agreement will need to detail what is considered completion of the development and the start of the 30 years of management and monitoring. There would also need to be a mechanism to condition the submission and approval of a HMMP and potentially a LEMP if specific ground conditions / preparation is required for proposed habitats. This may require the need for soil tests if grasslands of moderate distinctiveness are proposed to be created.

Please note it is unclear whether the developers off site land they wish to use to deliver off-site BNG is already registered as a habitat bank – if so, details of this should be provided, if not, and the developer wishes to secure this with a S106 with the LPA then draft heads of terms (as mentioned above) for this are required. If the development is phased, this will require the approval of an overall gain plan plus each phase separately.

Although it is a pre-commencement condition, to meet the biodiversity gain condition, there needs to be a demonstration that the biodiversity gain hierarchy has been applied.

As the delivery of BNG is tied into the HMMP, we would recommend demonstrating that the biodiversity gain hierarchy has been applied before the HMMP is secured to avoid any issues when it comes to securing the biodiversity gain plan. If the applicant wishes to submit a draft gain plan for comments, they may. The biodiversity gain plan would be submitted at the reserved matters stage.

Survey Longevity

Due to the mobility of animals and the potential for colonisation of the Site, it is recommended that an updated ecological survey be undertaken prior to the redevelopment of this Site should this not occur within 18 months of the date of the field survey (survey dated 26th March 2025).

Conditions

These conditions are based on the information provided to date. As further information is given e.g. the results of bat surveys, they will be added to.

Pre-Commencement Conditions

Precautionary Method of Works (PMW) and/or Construction and Ecology Management Plan (CEMP)

In line with the PEA, we recommend pre-commencement conditions securing precautionary method of works for badgers, bats, birds, reptiles and hedgehogs. These can be supplied as stand-alone documents or as part of a CEMP. There should be a sign off system to show that construction workers have read and understood the contents of these.

Reptiles

However, to mitigate the risk of mortality/injury to individual reptiles during the construction phase, a Precautionary Method of Works should be implemented. As reptiles typically hibernate underground or under log or stone piles (hibernacula), they are unlikely to be impacted by vegetation clearance works in winter unless tree stump removal or excavations are required. Where possible, stump removal or excavations should be undertaken in the active reptile season (spring/summer/early autumn). This means the ideal time to dig on site is September and October to avoid impacts to breeding birds and reptiles. Where this is not possible an ecologist should be present on site to perform checks immediately prior to works (24hrs).

Vegetation clearance is best timed for autumn/winter to avoid breeding birds (November - February inclusive) and active reptiles. Where this is not possible a check by a suitably experienced ecologist and potentially habitat manipulation using phased cuts may be required.

Where vegetation clearance on the Site is required in spring/summer, the habitats should first be cut to a height of 15-20cm by a hand tool such as brush cutter, progressing at walking pace only. The area should be left for 24-48hrs and then cut to 5cm using the same method, working in the same direction as the previous cut. This will allow any reptiles present to disperse into the wider environment unharmed. In the unlikely event that a reptile is seen during the works they should be allowed to escape unharmed at their own pace. Only a trained ecologist should attempt to move reptiles by hand. If multiple reptiles are encountered, works should cease, and the methodology be re-evaluated

Birds

Where possible, vegetation clearance should be minimised and undertaken outside the core bird nesting season (1st March and 31st August, though it should be noted that variation in dates is possible, for example from geographical variations in climate, or due to a particularly mild winter) to avoid damage or destruction of occupied nests or harm to breeding birds. If this cannot be achieved, works within the core bird nesting season will require an inspection of vegetation to be cleared for breeding birds and their occupied nests by a suitably qualified ecologist no more than 24 hours prior to any works being undertaken. If any nesting birds are identified during the survey, they will be left in situ for their entire nesting period and alternative approaches to the work proposed. This may include leaving an exclusion zone around the nests to avoid disturbance.

Hedgehogs

There is a risk that hedgehogs may traverse the Site during the construction period. It is recommended that best practice measures with regard to small mammals are adhered to during the construction phase of the Scheme. These measures are similar to those used for badgers. A precautionary method of works should be adhered to when conducting any vegetation clearance to minimise impact to commuting animals.

In line with the NPPF, local plan policy NE1 and the PEA, there should be the following features for wildlife are incorporated into the design, A pre-commencement condition confirming the number, citing and type of bat, bird and hedgehog boxes along with a hedgehog highway plan. This should include installation instructions for construction workers to follow. The following were suggested in the PEA:

- Provision of bird nest boxes (Schwegler 1B nest box) suitable for a range of common species to be affixed to the retained mature trees on site and to the residential dwellings.
- Provision of swift bricks, sparrow and starling boxes to be incorporated into the buildings.
- Provision of bat boxes to be affixed to the retained mature trees on site. Use of boxes such as the Vivara woodstone box provide a long-term nest box solution requiring limited replacement.
- Provision of bat boxes in respects to the new buildings. Use of in-cavity boxes such as Ibstock Enclosed Bat Box C provide a long-term nest box solution incorporated into the building.
- Provision of hedgehog boxes throughout the retained hedge and scrub habitats on site.

Any landscaping plan or LEMP should only include native floral species, where possible of local origin, be included in the landscaping of the site with a known attraction or benefit to local wildlife over the site, and also encourage invertebrates and enhance the site for foraging bats. The PEA also recommended that as far as possible, existing trees and hedgerows should be retained as part of the proposal. In addition to this, hedgerows should be managed for wildlife and cut on at least a two year rotation.

Conditions

A condition requiring demonstration that the features for biodiversity have been delivered as per the pre-commencement plans agreed for bat, bird and hedgehog boxes along with a hedgehog highway.